

Mt. Pleasant News

April 7, 2005

Program could make Great Places in Iowa

By Joe Benedict News Editor

Many in the community would say Mt. Pleasant is a great place. A new state program called Great Places could help provide funds to various projects to convince more people that not only Mt. Pleasant, but also other towns are great places.

Anita Walker, executive director of the Iowa Arts Council, said Gov. Tom Vilsack first spoke of the program in his State of the State address this year. He created the program by executive order in January.

Walker said the Great Places concept is different than that of past state programs. She said the program isn't so much about one project in any given town, but about tying together what makes towns great while doing some sprucing up.

She gave the example of the trail system being built in Mt. Pleasant. She said if one of those trails led to the downtown area and some of the apartments downtown were renovated, then the two would complement each other. Tying in other projects in Mt. Pleasant and around the area would bring in more business and tourism.

The definition of "place" is loose in the program as well. Walker said there really aren't any political boundaries for the program.

"A place could be all along the Mississippi," she said.

It also could be as small as a neighborhood. She said that depends on the vision of the people in a place. Walker said it is important for the state to help a place's vision come true and not have to change the vision to make it fit into the program.

There will be a coalition of 18 agencies involved in the Great Places program. The group will seek out some pilot programs. Great Places will send invitations to these programs by July 1. Through summer, Great Places coaches will work with the places to get their offers ready for presentation in September. By Oct. 1, a citizen advisory council appointed by Vilsack will help select three pilot Great Places. Negotiation with partnership agreements with those places will take place throughout the fall with final agreements by Dec. 31.

Walker will explain further details of the program at several public forums across the state. The meetings closest to Mt. Pleasant will be held in Muscatine from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. on May 26 at the Stanley Auditorium. There is a tentative date for a meeting in Cedar Rapids for June 1. The time and place for this meeting are yet to be decided. Information on the meetings and program can be found at www.culturalaffairs.org.